

## Theme: Cognitive Neuroscience

### Psychosocial factors affecting stigma towards mental illness: the role of familiarity and personal experience

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#### Abstract:

Mental illness stigma (MIS) is based on negative stereotypes and prejudice leading to discrimination. To this date, little is known about the nature of MIS, hindering the development of effective interventions. Our aim was to analyze the relationship between MIS and individual factors in a Portuguese community sample. 219 adults (mean age=44.2±15.2) answered to a survey with sociodemographics, questions about personal experience (PEMD) and contact (CMD) with mental disorders, and the validated questionnaires: Community Attitudes to Mental Illness (CAMI), Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) and Agreeableness, Openness to experience (Op) and Extraversion from HEXACO. The subsamples with PEMD (n=100;45.7%) and CMD (n=179;81.7%) revealed lower levels of stigma than the groups without/no-PEMD and without/no-CMD. Between the subsamples with PEMD vs no-PEMD and CMD vs no-CMD, the correlation patterns of stigma with age, education level, IRI and personality differed. Following correlations, these were inserted as predictors in linear multiple regression models where CAMI was the dependent variable. In the PEMD and CMD subsamples, Op and age were significant predictors (R<sup>2</sup>=.264 and R<sup>2</sup>=.212, respectively), while in no-PEMD and no-CMD subsamples only Op was (R<sup>2</sup>=.208 and R<sup>2</sup>=.355, respectively, all p≤.001). In the PEMD subsample only the total CAMI score and two of its subscales were different between CMD vs no-CMD, while in the no-PEMD subsample all stigma dimensions differed. In the CMD subsample all stigma dimensions differed between PEMD vs no-PEMD, while in the no-CMD subsample only one dimension did. Our results highlight the potential role of psychosocial variables in MIS both in people with and without PEMD or CMD. Differences between these groups suggest distinct contextual, cognitive and affective factors that influence stigma, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions in a society made of people with different experiences and levels of contact with mental illness.

**Keywords:** mental health; mental disorders; social stigma; personality; empathy